

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 002733

SIPDIS

NSC STAFF FOR POUNDS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/07/2015

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL EG

SUBJECT: MIXED REVIEWS OF HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL'S FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

REF: 04 CAIRO 9089 (NOTAL)

Classified by ECPO Counselor John P. Desrocher for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: After several months of delay, the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) has completed its first annual report on the state of human rights in Egypt. After review by the Presidency, the document is expected to be released next week. Our discussions with NCHR contacts suggest conflicting views from within the organization about the credibility and usefulness of the report. Many NCHR members give the report high marks, but one usually reliable contact told us that the report has been "cooked" by the GOE. We will have to wait until the report is actually released to make our own judgment about the degree to which the report strengthens or weakens the NCHR's credibility and furthers human rights transparency in the Arab world. End summary.

2. (C) In a poll of five NCHR members, the majority expressed confidence that the report would demonstrate progress on human rights in Egypt. Hafez Abou Se'ada, the head of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, told us that he was "very pleased with the result." Abou Se'ada noted that the executive summary took a "glass half-full" approach, indicating where the GOE was making progress in the struggle for human rights. Abou Se'ada said that the references to specific human rights violations, which serve as evidence of the GOE's inadequate human rights safeguards, were confined to the body of the report. He assured us that the body of the report addressed many of the issues that occupy the Department's Country Report on Human Rights, including torture, deaths in custody, and the Emergency Law.

3. (C) Hossam Badrawi, a reformist within the National Democratic Party (NDP), said the report merited a "B plus." He assured us that "we did not leave anything out." Ossama Al-Ghazzali Harb, an NDP member who also works for the Al-Ahram Center for Security and Political Studies, argued that NCHR members had their reputations to uphold, and that none of them would "sit still in the face of a wishy-washy report." According to Harb, "the segments that matter--Emergency Law, political rights, torture, prison conditions, freedom of expression--are all very candid and critical." Harb also noted that the GOE-dominated press would likely "concentrate on the positive," and focus on the elements of the report that showed the GOE in a favorable light.

4. (C) Munir Fakhry Abdel Nour, a businessman and opposition (Wafd) Member of Parliament said that the report was deeply critical of the GOE, and he had been surprised by initial press reports, in Al-Ahram and elsewhere, that said that the report would show that the human rights situation in Egypt was improving. Nour also observed that "many of us did not read the report thoroughly." He explained that a committee had prepared the draft, and then members had been invited one week before the final review to examine the draft at the NCHR offices. Draft copies were not circulated to the members. Nour said that few members actually had read the draft prior to the final review meeting. Nour, a prominent Coptic Orthodox Christian, also touched on the issue of religious freedom. Only after he completed the review session, he said, had he suddenly realized that he couldn't remember if the report addressed the issues of religious minorities. "We did indeed receive tens of complaints on problems surrounding church permits and renovations, but I did not notice if this was included in the body of the report or not." Comment: We find Nour's self-described lack of attention to issues of religious freedom puzzling given that he is widely seen by the NCHR's boosters as having an informal responsibility within the NCHR for Coptic issues. End comment.

5. (C) Finally, we also spoke with independent human rights activist Bahey Eddin Hassan, of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies. Hassan was much gloomier than the others. According to his information, the report was drafted by two main authors. Hassan said that Deputy Minister of Justice Sana Khalil drafted the sections of the report that dealt with Egyptian constitutional and legislative matters pertaining to human rights. Hassan said that the section of the report covering specific human rights violations was

drafted by an unnamed researcher who works for the Arab Organization for Human Rights, a pro-government NGO headed by NCHR member Ambassador (ret'd) Mohamed Fayek. Hassan said that his understanding was that NCHR Vice-President Dr. Kamal Aboul Magd, a former minister of information, closely controlled the drafting process and "at the end of the day (he) took everything and cooked it."

16. (C) Hassan, who formerly headed the NCHR's Cultural Rights Committee, noted that under his leadership, the Committee had drafted a paper for inclusion in the annual report addressing how Al-Azhar University discriminates against non-Muslim Egyptians and supports confiscation of religiously-objectionable publications through its Islamic Research Council. Hassan said that although the Cultural Rights Committee had unanimously recommended that this information be included in the final draft, Vice President Aboul Magd chose instead to shelve it without any discussion or debate by the Council as a whole. Hassan noted that his dismay at this episode had led him to decline to chair the Cultural Rights Committee for a second term. He said that he thinks many NCHR members are increasingly disappointed with the Council and that he is reconsidering his association with the organization.

17. (C) Comment: NCHR President Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the former U.N. Secretary General, told Ambassador Welch in December 2004 (reftel) that the NCHR's "credibility would depend on what we say in our first annual report." The contradictory opinions of our NCHR contacts suggest that we will need to review the actual text before we can offer a definitive analysis. Regardless of the nature of the published report, however, we think that its release should spark a useful Egyptian debate on the role of human rights in a democratizing society, and may herald an important development for the Arab world. End comment.

Visit Embassy Cairo's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/cairo>

You can also access this site through the
State Department's Classified SIPRNET website.

GRAY